The Collaborative Teacher: Working Together as a Professional Learning Community

_____

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *The Collaborative Teacher,* introduced by Richard DuFour with a foreword by Rebecca DuFour. *The Collaborative Teacher* seeks to change education from inside the classroom. Using insights from a variety of experts who have implemented and sustained collaborative cultures of continuous improvement in schools around the nation, this anthology offers best practices, expert insight and testimonials, and supporting research to show the benefits of collaboration in creating a school that reaches all students.

This study guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It is designed to help you benefit from and apply the ideas presented in *The Collaborative Teacher*. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire faculty to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school, and suggest steps that might be taken to improve collaboration. You might also compare and contrast the authors' positions on collaboration.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope that this guide proves to be a useful tool in your efforts to collaborate in your school or district.

Chapter 1

The New Teacher Leader: Transforming Education From Inside the Classroom

Cassandra Erkens

_____

1. How has the notion of teacher leadership changed over time? What's different about it today?

2. The author describes four roles. What are they? What do the four roles have in common?

3. What makes each of the four roles unique but complementary to the other roles?

4. How does each role support the work of transforming education from inside the classroom?

5. In *your setting,* what are the beliefs, practices, and structures that would best enable teachers to live and work within these four roles in their classrooms?

Chapter 2

Creating Intentional Collaboration

Susan K. Sparks

_____

1. The author opens by listing characteristics of unproductive meetings and of effective meetings. Which list best describes the meetings held at your school? Are some meetings you attend or lead more effective than others? If so, how do you account for the difference?

2. The author describes five keys to successful team meetings. List and describe each.

3. Are your grade-level or subject-area team meetings guided by SMART goals and clear objectives and products? If not, why not—for example, are the goals unclear, nonexistent, or simply unenforced?

4. The author describes three critical team roles and responsibilities. Name and describe each.

5. What devices does the author recommend to introduce structure to team meetings? Which of these devices does your team use? Are they used successfully? Why or why not?

6. The author suggests that the process for a team meeting must engage everyone on the team to accomplish the goal. Is every team member engaged in the process to meet your goal, or do some merely attend? What could you do to more fully engage your human resources on the team?

7. List the nonverbal and verbal communication techniques the author describes. Which of these does your team leader regularly use? Which do you use as an individual member of the team? Which techniques could you use more often?

Chapter 3

Teacher Talk: How Collaboration Gets to the Heart of Great Schools

Thomas W. Many

_____

1. The author makes the case that collaboration is at the heart of what makes schools better. To what extent are your school and team fully collaborative in terms of practice, language, and relationships?

2. What are three specific collaborative practices that the author argues will yield the greatest results in student learning? Which of these practices do you engage in at your school, and to what extent? What other practices should your team consider?

3. The author notes that collaboration requires a shared language and clarity around key terms. Which ideas or terms create confusion in your school? What consequences do you see to that confusion? What steps could your team take today to start eliminating confusion?

4. What are the three levels of responsibility and accountability that the author defines? To what extent does your school exhibit these characteristics?

Chapter 4

Too Much to Teach: How to Identify What Matters Most

Chris Jakicic

_____

1. Discuss your current reality as it relates to a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Have you identified those standards and outcomes that are most important for your subject area and grade level? How does your team make sure that you are all teaching the essential outcomes?

2. Is your curriculum viable? Can you teach all of the identified essential outcomes in the time allotted, or are teachers still picking and choosing what to teach? Have you created a pacing guide?

3. Do you have the right members on your team to talk about your curriculum? Do you have a process in place that assures everyone's voice is heard?

4. The author has identified strengths and weaknesses of several options for completing the process of identifying power standards. Which process makes the best sense for your team?

5. The author discusses some typical concerns for teachers—losing their academic freedom and worrying whether students will be prepared for the state test. Have

these issues been discussed by your team? If they come up, how will your team

address them?

6. How will your team "publish" the essential outcomes and power standards once

they are identified? What is your plan to use them effectively?

7. How will your team evaluate the quality of your final product? How will you

decide when and if you want to add or remove an outcome from your list?

Chapter 5

Instructional Improvement From the Inside Out: Lesson Study at Work

Eric Twadell

_____

1. Define *lesson study* as the author describes it, and discuss the steps in the process.

2. If your school already uses lesson study, discuss whether your process aligns with the author's description. If not, discuss whether your team would be willing to try it this year.

3. In the author's story of lesson study in practice, the team struggles to identify a suitable topic for lesson study. Discuss what makes a topic suitable and how a team could identify a short list of possible topics.

4. In the story, Eduardo feels good after the lesson because of high student participation, but his peers point out that the student responses did not show higher order and critical thinking skills. Discuss how you currently differentiate between participation and *meaningful* participation in your individual classrooms. Do you regularly distinguish between the two? What criteria do you use?

5. Steve's version of the lesson goes deeper than Eduardo's, but takes too long. Discuss depth versus breadth; which is more important to achieve, and why? How often do you extend a lesson to ensure learning? How often do you cut it short to stay "on time"?

6. Describe the benefits of using lesson study in a PLC.

Chapter 6

Connecting Curriculum Mapping to Assessment for Learning

Dennis King

_____

1. The author describes curriculum mapping as a tool to close the gap between the written and the taught curriculum. How wide is that gap in your classroom? In your school as a whole? How do you know?

2. Does your school or district pacing guide provide a useful tool, or is it filed away and rarely consulted? Is every teacher aware of the essential standards and skills that must be taught for each grade level and/or subject area? How are these communicated? In your experience, do teachers at your school teach those standards and skills? How do you know?

3. What does the author identify as two ways that teachers use a curriculum map?

4. The author describes the importance of assessment *for* learning. What is the difference between formative and summative assessment? What are the five keys of best assessment practices? To what extent do you use these practices in your classroom now?

5. How are learning targets best identified, according to the author? To what extent has your team accomplished that work?

6. How are assessments linked to the curriculum map?

Chapter 7

Teaching in the Dark

Lillie G. Jessie

_____

1. The author suggests that for teachers to make the shift from *hoping* for good student performance on an end-of-year assessment to *knowing* how well students will perform, they must openly discuss their failures and weaknesses with others. What are some of the barriers to having such a discussion?

2. The author lists the developmental stages of openly sharing data, but first she shares personal views of teachers and other professional colleagues as they began the PLC journey. Why do you think she felt it was important to share the ups and downs of her journey to success? What are some of the struggles you have had as a school and/or team?

3. The author states that it is important not to confuse reluctance or resistance with total defiance. What is the difference between those terms? Why is it important not to confuse them?

4. Richard DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Rebecca DuFour constantly discuss the need to assess your current reality. The author lists seven stages of buy-in for using data. Using the following chart, assess your current reality for using data.

- First assess your own personal stage of development, and discuss it with your team.

- Then try to reach consensus on the developmental level of your team.

- Finally, assess your school and district status.

Developmental Stages for Data Buy-In
_____ **Individual Assessment:** Where am I personally on the developmental scale?
_____ **Team Assessment:** Where are we as a team?
_____ **School Assessment:** Where are we as a school?
_____ **School Division Assessment:** Where are we as a school division?
_____ **Stage 1: Shock** "You have got to be kidding!"
_____ **Stage 2: Professional Resistance** "I don't have time for testing. . . . I've got to teach!"
_____ **Stage 3: Fear** "Will my data be used against me?"
_____ **Stage 4: Reluctant Compliance** "You can make me collect the data, but you can't make me use it."
_____ **Stage 5: Discovery** "My kids are learning more than I thought. . . . I can spend my time teaching other things."

_____ **Stage 6: Bargaining** "Something's in it for me and for my team."

_____ **Stage 7: Advocacy** "I can't live without data! Teaching without data is like getting dressed in the dark."

---

5. The author lists reasons why people may stay at a certain level of buy-in regarding the use of data. Discuss those reasons, and determine if they coincide with your observations. What other reasons do you see?

6. What solutions does the author discuss for helping colleagues become data advocates? What solutions might work in your school or team? If applicable, how can your team or school support those who have a genuine need to use data in an environment of nonbelievers?

Chapter 8

Common Assessments: Bridging the Gap Between Teaching and Learning

Ainsley B. Rose

_____

1. What are the questions about common assessment that every teacher in a PLC must be able to answer? Are you able to answer those questions as an individual and/or team?

2. What, according to the author, makes a common assessment "common"? Do your team's common assessments meet the author's definition? Why or why not?

3. The author cites five questions that Rick DuFour recommends teachers ask to determine the value of assessments for student learning. What are those five questions? Discuss, question by question, the extent to which your team's assessments meet that criteria.

4. Students play a pivotal role in their own learning. How can common assessments be used to engage students in their learning?

5. Identify the four steps of creating a common assessment, and discuss how well your team follows those four steps. Which steps are the most difficult, and why?

6. What kind of professional development might help your team create better common assessments?

Chapter 9

An Integrated Response to Learning: Eight Strategies That Work

Sharon V. Kramer

_____

1. The author suggests that most teachers teach to the middle range of student abilities. Do you agree? What's wrong with teaching to the middle to reach most students?

2. A professional learning community uses both interventions and enrichments. Explain why these are needed. What are the characteristics of each?

3. What is a common formative preassessment, and what are its benefits? How do teachers use the results?

4. Explain what a pyramid of interventions is and how each of its three tiers are different. How does a pyramid of enrichment compare?

5. The author gives eight examples of an integrated response to learning. Select two that you feel have the most application to your own school to discuss with your team. What characteristics of the response are effective for student learning? How could you adapt the response to your students' needs?

Epilogue

A New Era of Spectacular Teachers

Mary Ann Ranells

—————————————

1. The author notes that she returned to the classroom, after serving as deputy superintendent at the state level, to better understand the difference between the mandate for highly qualified teachers and the reality in classrooms. What realities do you wish that policymakers were more aware of? How willing are you to challenge those realities if it would result in greater student learning? Discuss.

2. The author lists five characteristics of spectacular teachers. Identify and discuss each. To what extent do you agree with her list? What other characteristics would you include?

3. Are trusting relationships consciously built through specific practices in your classroom and/or school? In what ways do you build trusting relationships with your most difficult-to-reach students?

4. The author suggests that spectacular teachers design learning systems. What does she mean by "systems"?

5. In the bulleted list on page 210, the author reviews what Robert Marzano's research on grading suggests. Discuss each bullet. To what degree does your experience as teachers support or refute each point? Have you altered your grading practices as individuals and/or a team?

6. How many "hats" do you wear as a teacher in your school? How can teachers find balance between active involvement and overload?

7. What legacy are you personally trying to create for your students? With your team, take turns interviewing a fellow team member, and share his or her legacy with the team. Discuss ways in which you can support and inspire each other on an ongoing basis.